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SUBJECT: GHANAIAN PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY SHOWS RISING

CONCERNS ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND CORRUPTION

REF: A) ACCRA 1051 B) ACCRA 892

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: A March survey of popular opinion in Ghana, released on July 6 by the Center for Democratic Development, revealed mounting concern about the economy and corruption, especially perceived corruption by the president and his staff. Nonetheless, the survey revealed that support for democratic fundamentals, a Ghanaian national identity, and the incumbent Kufuor administration remain strong. The president's approval ratings are high and the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) would win by 52% if an election were held again, according to the survey. Opposition parties have had mixed reactions. End Summary.

Unhappy About the Economy

¶12. (U) On July 6, the highly respected Ghanaian NGO Center for Democratic Development (CDD) released the results of its third survey of popular opinion in Ghana (the other two were done in 1999 and 2002). The poll, termed an "Afrobarometer" and partly funded by USAID, was conducted between March 10 - 21, 2005 among a nationally representative sample of 1,199 adults. On the economic front, the statistics paint a grim picture: 63% of respondents view the overall state of the economy as "bad," while 65% describe their own standard of living as "bad." The biggest economic concern was unemployment, with 22% citing unemployment as the country's worst problem (down from 34% in the 2002 survey). Respondents perceive a worsening job market and have growing concerns about education and health. Skepticism toward free market economics continues: 78% of those surveyed felt that all public servants should be allowed to keep their jobs, 66% believed the GOG's economic policies have hurt the majority of Ghanaians, 59% asserted that economic liberalization has widened the gap between rich and poor, and slightly over half opined that economic reform had lowered the general standard of living.

Overall Satisfaction with President Kufuor

¶13. (U) The survey asked a number of questions designed to gauge popular impressions of the incumbent Kufuor administration. The president received high marks in virtually all areas, other than the economy. Over 70% lauded the GOG's performance in combating HIV/AIDS, improving basic health services, reducing crime, and addressing educational needs. Between 50-60 percent of respondents felt the GOG had done well in delivering water, ensuring that everyone had enough to eat, and fighting corruption. 87% of Ghanaians expressed trust in President Kufuor and 76% approved of his performance in office. When the survey asked respondents to name the political party they would support if elections were held tomorrow, the incumbent National Patriotic Party (NPP) beat the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), 52 to 22%. (Another 22% said they would not vote and 4% of the vote would go to minor parties.)

Corruption Increasing

¶14. (U) Despite general approval of Kufuor's performance, respondents expressed growing concerns about corruption in Ghana. The perception that corruption is commonplace increased between 2002 and 2005 for every public institution covered in the survey. The biggest increase was perceived corruption by the president and his staff (up from 38% of respondents in 2002 to 56% in 2005.) Perceptions that corruption is commonplace also increased for members of parliament (up from 52 to 59%). The perception is highest for the police (81%), judiciary (72%), and tax officials (71%). Over half of respondents said corruption was commonplace among health workers and teachers, while 12-15% of respondents indicated they had paid a bribe to the police, health care workers, or school officials, or to obtain household services such as electricity, water, or telephone connections.

15. (U) Although ethnic awareness remains high, a plurality of Ghanaians (42%) feel equal loyalty to their Ghanaian and ethnic identities. Another 23% consider themselves exclusively "Ghanaian," with no particularly tribal loyalties, while only 18% said they identified themselves primarily or exclusively by their tribal ethnicity. Ghanaians were divided (47 to 43%) over whether they perceive tribal favoritism, with the larger number alleging that the GOG had treated their ethnic group fairly. The Afrobarometer also found that 75% of Ghanaians say they take part regularly in religious activities.

Reaction to the Survey

16. (U) The CDD survey received extensive media coverage and met a range of responses. The opposition NDC had varying reactions. According to press reports, the NDC's former presidential candidate John Atta Mills lambasted the report, calling it "bogus and fraudulent," questioning the relevance of the findings that the NPP would trounce the NDC in national elections, if the elections were held today. Other NDC officials said they wanted to study the report more carefully, while some concurred with the survey's findings on corruption and the economy and one NDC youth leader called the report a "wake up call."

17. (U) Minister of Information (and former NPP General Secretary) Dan Botwe said the GOG was examining the survey

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results despite its contradictions, acknowledging that the GOG still had a lot of work to do to "bring (economic) development to our people." He added that perhaps some respondents did not fully understand the poll's questions. One maverick within the NPP, MP Kennedy Agyapong, also cautioned against his party's taking too much comfort from the survey, calling on the CDD to "stop deceiving Ghanaians as well as the NPP." He noted that previous polls had over-estimated the NPP's winning margins during the elections of December 2004.

18. (U) The small CPP party said the report needed to be reviewed dispassionately, highlighting the findings on corruption and the economy. Journalist Kwesi Pratt, Jr., editor of the daily Insight, opined that the CDD's unexpected polling results may have resulted from an attempt to please its donors. Another journalist, Alfred Ogbamey of the Gyen Nyame Concord, added that the survey had been conducted hastily at a time when the GOG was still forming a cabinet. He derided the contradictory findings of widespread corruption together with high support for President Kufuor as "irreconcilable."

Comment

19. (SBU) The overall conclusions of the report track with our sense of politics and economics in Ghana. It is not surprising that the March survey would show party support at a level comparable to the results of the national election only three months earlier (which the NPP won with 52 percent of the vote). One CDD researcher who worked on the Afrobarometer told PolChief that most of the 22% in the CDD study who say they would not vote are probably NDC supporters (some of whom may not want to reveal their preferences, especially to an NGO which the NDC views as NPP-biased). This would validate the NDC's 44% showing in the national elections. Many analysts attributed the NPP's narrow margin of victory in the election to popular perceptions that the masses had not benefited from economic growth. A majority of voters at the time of the election were willing to give President Kufuor more time -- and the survey suggests this may still be the case. This may explain the contradiction in the survey between growing unhappiness about Kufuor's record on the economy and corruption and sustained support for the Kufuor presidency. It also suggests that other issues not captured by the CDD survey (such as fears about the NDC because of its legacy, ethnic divides, personalities, the NPP's record on civil liberties, local issues, etc.) may weigh more heavily on voting decisions.

110. (SBU) As post has reported previously (refs A and B), the success of the second Kufuor administration will depend in large measure on how it handles the economy (especially its ability to reduce poverty among the masses) and how it controls corruption. The issue of corruption has received significant press over the past few months, which no doubt impacted the survey perceptions. Other sources concur with CDD's findings that there is a popular perception of rising corruption among public institutions. CDD Executive Director Gyimah-Boadi told PolChief he believes that in this case

perception has some basis in reality and that the African Peer Review Report on Ghana (which he has helped draft and is expected to be released in August) will also highlight concerns about corruption.

¶11. (SBU) Perhaps the most encouraging (though not surprising) news in the survey was that two-thirds of those polled saw democracy as preferable to any other kind of government and that, despite concerns about corruption, there is a high level of popular trust for many public institutions, including the Electoral Commission, parliament, the judiciary, and security services. Ghanaians are willing to give their democracy time to work through its problems. However, in the conclusion of the Afrobarometer report, CDD notes that "The billion cedi question is whether Ghanaian democratic development can be sustained without significant improvements in the popular welfare." At the least, the Afrobarometer report is serving to sharpen the public debate on governance, especially on the issue of corruption, which is healthy for Ghana's democratic development.

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